# A STUDY OF MEDITATION

BY
DAVID JENKS, S.S.M.

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*Fourth Edition*

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1926

## PREFACE TO FOURTH EDITION.

THIS short study was first published in 1909. It would be strange if after sixteen years the writer should wish to leave it unaltered. But he is certain that whatever help it may have given, or may yet be able to give, to those who wish to meditate in a simple way, is solely due to the particular conditions that brought it into existence. He thinks therefore that he does well to leave it untouched, and to put into an appendix a few reflections that suggest themselves as he reads again the informal addresses that he used to give to his students at Kelham.

DAVID JENKS, S.S.M.

*Easter Monday*, 1926.

### EXTRACT FROM PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION.

"It is only honest to say that whatever there may be of real use in the substance of the following pages is due to its having been tested by application to successive generations of our own theological students, whose earnest sincerity has contributed far more guidance that it can have received."

*Feast of St. Michael and All Angels*, 1909.

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## Chapter I

## ON THE NEED OF MEDITATION

THE world presses very closely upon us, and we have to live in it. Being enveloped by what is visible, only by great effort can we escape from its power; and if we do not make this effort we shall be overcome by the material and the temporal.

But the fact remains that the things which are seen are temporal, the things which are not seen are eternal; and we, too, are eternal.

Over against sight lies faith, and the realm of faith is therefore the unseen—the invisible and the future. "Now faith is the giving substance to things hoped for, the test of things not seen" (R.V. marg.); "faith is the grounded conviction of things hoped for, that which tries and tests things not seen" (the late Dean Plumtre). This is the first consideration of the value of meditation, which is realising the unseen. When St. Thomas of Aquin was asked by his sister how she could save her soul, he said, "By willing it." Now spiritual consideration will help us to do this, for it is largely through the pressure upon us of the visible and temporal that the realities of eternal life are pushed out of the mind until the desire for them is lost.

This obvious truth is nevertheless worth a little closer consideration. We have only been putting into other words the common snare of worldliness. Men of business and housewives are alive to this danger, but clergymen and theological students do not always seem sufficiently aware of it; they know, indeed, that the devil besets them, that they feel his subtle persuasions acting upon the natural inclinations of the heart in many a rising temper, envious thought, sin of pride. They know that so long as they are in the body the sins of the flesh may assail. But, the world! Have they not left it, with its ambitions, exciting pleasures and money-getting? And just by reason of this unpreparedness they fall a prey to the snares which beset them; for the temptation of the world is just worldliness, a distraction of mind in which

the many duties of life may prove so engrossing as to obscure the conscious realisation of life here and to-day in the kingdom of the Son of God's love.

Danger lurks also in the thought that life in the theological college, with congenial companions, will be easy. Worldliness is compatible with much plainness of living and with heavenly occupations ; it is nothing but the inevitable consequence of the presence of the material and temporal upon our human constitution, if it be not sustained in fellowship with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ and with one another in Him. In one word, worldliness is distraction ; and its spirit haunts the life of the priest and of the theological student, making its victims like athletes who have become relaxed in muscle. Its presence may be detected in many little ways, in loss of fervour, distraction in prayer, a sense of monotony and dulness, or in a contrary sense of being rushed, and in trivial selfishness in friendships. We go a day's journey *supposing* Him to be in the company, and we do not always go back promptly to Jerusalem (S. Luke ii. 44, 45).

There is a technical name for this distraction ; it is called *accidie*.* It is well-known under many a slang term ; sometimes it is called " feeling bored," or " having the blues," or " being off colour " ; at other times it shows itself in frivolity or in peevishness. For the time God has been lost, life is spent in the shadow instead of in the substance, in the material rather than in the sacramental reality which the material is meant to convey to us.

Further, it is true that those who are most liable to suffer from this evil are often the more blind to it, because, while they are carefully watchful against other sins, they do not reckon the danger which besets them from that sin which gradually creeps over the soul until it loses touch with God. " It is good for me," said the devout psalmist, " to hold me fast by God." In eastern countries one may often sit outside the tent door on the hills in the cool of the evening, and watch the malarial mist rise up over the city below and envelop it. In the city one does not see it ; it is only the effects which are felt there, a certain listlessness and relaxation. One must be up on the hills from whence cometh one's help, where the face shines as one communes with God, in the mount where one sees the glory through the Divine Passion, on the hill of Zion where it pleases God to dwell.

Here, then, is one great need of the exercise of meditation ; and it is more satisfactory to approach the subject in this

* In *The Spirit of Discipline*, by F. Paget, late Bishop of Oxford, there is a valuable introductory essay *Concerning accidie*.

manner than to attempt any formal definition, or to be drawn off into a discussion upon the right name by which to call the exercises under consideration. To meditate—whatever else it may be—is to realise the presence of God, to see the invisible, to apprehend the eternal. And its end is to hold one fast by God.

There is a second important consideration of the value of this devotion. The priest and the theological student are greatly occupied with the study of the Bible and the dogmatic truths of religion ; the former has also, and the latter will soon have, the further responsibility of preaching sound theology in such way that it shall reach the hearts of his people ; he instructs to edify. How shall he do this, and avoid on the one hand working upon the emotions only, and on the other the offering of dry bones to a hungry congregation? The student has to spend week after week over the Bible, " getting it up," studying it critically, translating it, and the like ; to him the Bible is a well-thumbed text-book. After a little time he will add philosophy and dogmatics to his course of studies, and he should know how to apply his lectures to meditation, learning on his knees the same truths from another side, which he is investigating in the study. The importance of this union of devotional and intellectual life may be illustrated from two cases of personal experience. The one is of a student who complained that he knew God until he came to think about how he knew Him ; metaphysics, he thought, had robbed him of God. It was a most melancholy confession, however one looks at it, but the question which is raised by it would require investigation in more than one way, and it must suffice that we remind ourselves that we shall never understand Christian doctrine aright if the head and heart do not work together. " If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine." The other case is of a university lecturer, now a well-known English bishop, who told one of his students in confidence that before delivering his lectures upon the doctrinal controversies of the early Church he prayed much, fearing otherwise the effect which might be produced upon their minds.

Another set of associations has now been sketched, the materials of our study, which are to be the tools of our craft. The materials may be the source of great danger, the tools may be useless in our hands. What if we lose our devotion to the Bible, if it cease to be for us—not in name, but in experience—the Word of God ! What if Christian doctrine become to us only a technical vocabulary, which we can use

skilfully, rather as a barrister marshalling his arguments than as a Christian who is convinced that it is a revelation of eternal life.

The Holy Bible is to be the great store-house of meditation, by entering into which it will reveal to us its deep mysteries. Especially we shall learn to dwell upon the life of Jesus Christ in every detail, until we live with Him as the scenes of the Gospel history are reproduced within our own experience : we must not talk ancient history to our people. So, too, must we take care to make religious truths live, and the great facts of the Christian Faith ; dogma is to be vitalised until we live in the strength of it. " If ye continue in My word, then are ye My disciples indeed ; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." One must not be content merely to hold truth—the truth—in a spirit of loyalty ; the truth is to live in us, holding us, possessing us. By contemplation, worship, prayer, the Christian's faith must be applied to life.

Here, then, are two great cycles of truth which shew how important a place meditation must have in the lives of clergymen and theological students. To them shall be added, in conclusion, a reflection which will illustrate an important feature of meditation. Our Lord twice said, " Blessed are the eyes which see the things that *ye* see " ; and on one of these occasions He had said just previously, " I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou didst hide these things from the wise and understanding, and didst reveal them unto babes." Now it was not the privilege of seeing Him in the flesh for which He called them blessed, for spiritual privilege is rather a great responsibility than a blessing in itself ; one, indeed, which may become an inestimable blessing, but which may, however, become the climax of condemnation. And there is no privilege, unless duly used, that can be equal to the great gift of spiritual desire, such as kings, prophets, and righteous men of old had possessed, who "desired to see the things which ye see and saw them not, and to hear the things which ye hear and heard them not." But the disciples were blessed because they saw what hundreds in the towns and villages might have seen but did not see. They saw that " even the devils are subject unto us in Thy Name." And they were blessed because they had ears to hear when the Master unfolded to them " the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven " (see St. Luke x. 17-24, St. Matthew xiii. 10-17).

The characteristic feature of meditation is not intellectual-

ism, but spiritual insight, the power to see and to hear which is given to those who become as little children. May the Almighty God grant to us to read aright the parables of life, as He interprets them according to our spiritual capacity and needs, while in devout contemplation we ponder over the divine mysteries. May we find within ourselves, and in the power of intercession, that even devils are subject unto us in His Name.

## Chapter II

## ON THE PREPARATORY EXERCISES

IN a well-known article by the late Canon Liddon it is written that Bishop Hamilton of Salisbury used to say that "no man was likely to do much good in prayer who did not begin by looking on it in the light of a work to be prepared for and persevered in with all the earnestness which we bring to bear upon subjects which are in our opinion at once most interesting and most necessary." We may take these words as equally applicable to meditation, and may be sure that the first preparation for such a work is of the heart, since meditation may not inaptly be described as seeing with the eyes of the heart. Cleverness will carry one no way along this road, but "blessed are the pure in heart—the single-eyed—for they shall see God."

He who would learn to meditate upon God must, therefore, be prepared from the first for the valuable discipline of disappointment. The superficial and the careless, who cannot concentrate their will upon prayer, must necessarily be unable at present to fix the mind in meditation; the double-minded, who would serve God and self, are unable to fix the will upon God. But to the humble and contrite heart God willeth to reveal Himself. Some, when they reach the first difficulty, are inclined to withdraw from a task for which they feel themselves unprepared; but it is more profitable to reflect how greatly they need to concentrate the mind upon God in steady reflection, in order that by degrees the will may become fixed upon Him at all times. For some months it may be that the real work of meditation will be the saturation of the whole being with the thought of God until He shall direct the mainspring of all the actions. Then, when God rules within, the secret of meditation has been discovered.

This process is very disheartening to those who seek the pleasurable sensations of having made a good meditation; and it is well for such to consider that it is an entire misunderstanding if one suppose that the end of a meditation is self-satisfaction. If such find that they can meditate satisfactorily to themselves, and that the task is easy, they are experiencing the truth of the words, "He gave them their desires, and sent leanness withal into their souls." It is not enjoyment that is to be sought in a meditation, but God; and it may well be that the history of His dealings will be such as the Son of Sirach found the pursuit of divine wisdom; "At the first she will walk with him by crooked ways, and bring fear and dread upon him, and torment him with her discipline, until she may trust his soul, and try him by her

laws. Then will she return the straight way unto him, and comfort him, and shew him her secrets."

But there is a more immediate preparation for meditation, which consists of the preparation of the heart for the special subject of a particular meditation. A few elementary rules of guidance may be laid down as of general use. A subject, or a text from Holy Scripture, or a passage from some book which has been read that day, should be definitely fixed overnight, and a few minutes' thought given to it. Most people can spare very little time for this; the day has been fully occupied, the evening finds one tired, and there are night prayers to be said, and other devotions if they have been unwisely left until one can only give a wearied attention to them. All that is necessary, but not, however, all that may be desirable, is that the subject shall be fixed in the mind so that in the morning the meditation can be made without appeal to any book or slip of paper. And by the fixing of the subject in the mind is to be understood that one should have a glimpse in a general way of what one hopes to develop; thus the appetite is made keen and the memory is quickened. This suggestion will seem so obvious that it was not in need to be mentioned; but there is the melancholy picture, which rises in the mind, of the would-be meditant who takes out his watch to see how long time he has to fill, and then searches his Bible for a subject, only in the end to be so distracted by his search that when he has selected his topic he is unable to fix his thoughts upon it.

With the night prayers a remembrance should be made of the intended meditation, and a commendation made of it to God, with a short petition, "Lord, lift Thou up the light of Thy countenance upon me"; and it is a very good exercise, profitable also for other reasons, to turn over the subject quietly in the mind while going to sleep. The meditation is now ready for the morning.

Undoubtedly the early morning is the time best to be chosen, either before or after breakfast, but certainly before the day's work begins, or the day's distraction of speech. The meditation is to be for the day what the retreat is for the year. As to place, experience varies; a church or private chapel is the best; here all the surroundings assist; but in some cases the prayer desk in the bedroom may be necessary. There is very little to be said in favour of the garden or the fields, especially for the inexperienced. It is pleasant to get fresh air, there is probably no disturbance, and yet one must reckon the really serious drawback that one cannot kneel, and

one must be confident that one will not easily be distracted by the sound of birds, the delight of trees and flowers, the charm of sunlight. But one who has been privileged to live under the shadow of the Master's garden within the walls of Pembroke College, Cambridge, will not lightly be unmindful of Bishop Andrewes' walk. Nevertheless, two dangers seem to lurk in this outdoor meditation for those who have not as yet acquired concentration and considerable experience. There is the snare of placid dreaming, a mild form of nature worship, not amounting in reality to more than a keeping of silence ; or, if the meditation be strenuous and engrossing, it runs the risk of becoming too much a work of the head and too little of the heart. To walk in the garden in silence is to think ; to kneel down is to lay open the heart before God.

The Church or the private chapel is, therefore, to be preferred ; and first one must kneel down. To kneel down is a serious matter, it is a deliberate act of worship, and is not to be performed as a conventionality, but with intention. It is a placing of oneself humbly in the presence of God. We cannot afford to neglect the body when drawing near to Almighty God, seeing that we are not souls imprisoned in a material cage, but human beings of body and soul in union. Body and soul must aid one another, they cannot fail mutually to affect each other, therefore make the will dominate the body, and by making the body reverent and worshipful the whole being will be rightly directed.

Whether this attitude of kneeling is to be maintained throughout the meditation is another matter, but at the least the meditation will begin and close thus. The saints allowed great liberty in this matter, and it would be an exaggeration to insist overmuch upon a special attitude so long as there be kneeling at the most solemn parts, and the change of posture be not made from any lack of self-discipline. It is very profitable, however, for beginners to kneel throughout their meditation. Some try to meditate sitting, which is conducive rather to hard thinking than to worship and the opening of the soul to God ; while some even recline in an attitude which invites sleep, shifting their posture until the body is in a position of complete ease. In such ways they increase their difficulties, while they withhold from God a part of that worship which they might offer Him ; for it is not to be disregarded that, even if one seem able to do nothing else, one might worship Him with the body, and that is with the will which dominates it. It is no light matter, nor unprofitable, thus to kneel before God in silence for a quarter of an hour or

longer; indeed, if this be done, while trying to realise His presence, by repeating to oneself at intervals that one is kneeling in His sight as a humble and contrite servant, one is meditating. For a meditation is not the preparation of a sermon, nor the collecting of notes upon a meditation, nor the pursuit of original thoughts, but it is the bringing into close contact two personalities, and one of these is God Himself.

Many beginners think that they cannot meditate; they are led astray by the word. If for the moment one substitute a circumlocution, and call this exercise "thinking about God," "giving the heart to God," "dedicating the day to God," "trying to realise God's presence," "kneeling before God and letting His hand rest upon one," however inadequate these expressions may seem to anyone who has a slight book-knowledge of the technique of a meditation, they are in truth much nearer to the real exercise than the disturbing impression often held of the elaborateness and difficulty of the task. Truly, if for one moment, while thus kneeling, the breath of God be felt, and His voice whispered in the heart, the essential profit of a meditation has been acquired. And this we can all do if the heart be right with Him, and the will be actively directed towards Him.

Having knelt down, and signed with the cross while saying slowly the Invocation, the next exercise is to make an act of the presence of God. "How dreadful is this place; this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." Or, "My God, I am come into Thy presence; give me grace to realise it as I kneel before Thee." Or, "Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldest come under my roof; but speak the word only and Thy servant shall be healed." Or, "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth." Then a slight pause, to grasp what one is saying. Now make a prayer of humble access, remembering that one enters His presence as a creature before his Creator, a sinner before his Judge, but yet also before his Saviour, and as a child before his Father. The angels, it is said, veil their faces before Him. Shall we approach Him carelessly? It is good that each should make for himself some prayer of approach, which he can use daily, perhaps occasionally varying it slightly to emphasise now one now another element of it. To use the same words every day is perhaps best, if one avoid the snare of hurry and, in consequence, of words without meaning. If for a few weeks one is prepared very patiently to practise these exercises, it will be found that already one has an almost fixed form of prayer of

humble access. " O my God, I am not worthy to approach Thee, and yet Thou hast called me to Thyself and made me Thine. Pardon my unworthiness, illuminate the dulness of my understanding, strengthen my will, enkindle my affections, warm my emotions, and do with me as Thou wilt in this meditation." Or, " Father, I have sinned against Thee, and am not worthy to be called Thy son ; make me as one of Thy hired servants, who stand in their Master's presence. Yea, happy, Lord, are they who stand continually before Thee and hear Thy wisdom. Lord, incline my heart to Thy words."

The King has now been approached in proper reverence of mind and body ; the next exercise is to call to one's aid the illuminating grace of the Holy Spirit. Upon Him must be placed all dependence for that which is to follow ; He is to be the Conductor of the short retreat. Therefore invoke Him, using either the collect for Whitsunday, or preferably saying very slowly the *Veni Creator*, pausing for a moment at the end of each line that one may apprehend the words.

It is possible that at this stage two thoughts may occur. One of them is that if only a short time is to be spent in meditation a large portion of it has been already appropriated by Invocation, act of Divine presence, prayer of humble access, and hymn to the Holy Ghost, all of which are to be said slowly and with pauses. Now if the meditation is intended to occupy only fifteen minutes, five of them are not too many for these preparatory acts. It is a misunderstanding of the nature of the occupation to regard these devotions as solely preparatory : the preparation was made the previous night ; these acts and prayers are a part, a very important part, of the meditation. For a meditation is not something to be got through and done with, still less is it an exercise which we can hope to do apart from the grace of God.

This thought may be illustrated from the life of sonship. A son feels himself at home in his father's house ; he has been caught up by the spirit of his inheritance, and reproduces in his life the influence of his domestic surroundings. More especially he is affected by the character of his father, and the impress which he has given to all that belongs to the house. In meditation the son attempts to bring home to himself the fact that he is living in like manner in his Father's house ; nothing can be of equal importance to him at this moment with the spirit of reverence and submission to the divine influence. Even though he proceed no further with his meditation than has been already described, he has begun

to meditate. But if he begin at the stage of recalling his subject, and omit these preparations of himself, he may be doing various things—sermon-composition, self-examination, or the solving of a problem—but he is not doing the thing which he came to do.

The second thought which may occur is that, while invited not to read further at present than this chapter until some little experience of freedom has been acquired in what is here suggested, there is no hint of what shall be done after these preparatory acts are ended. This apparent incompleteness is not of serious moment, and may indeed serve a useful purpose. Let the mind be thoroughly impressed by the truth that the essence of a meditation does not lie in its machinery : many Christians have made good meditations before they knew the technical scheme of a meditation, and have even meditated for a lifetime without hearing about the work of the imagination and the work of the intellect in this connection.

It is well, therefore, that the beginner be content for the present with his previous practice of meditating, and fill it with the spirit of the suggestions here made, until the habit has been acquired of using these acts in such way that they begin to commend themselves to him by the consciousness of increased reverence, and in a sense of hallowedness, as he passes on day after day into such thoughts of God and holy things as he has been accustomed to think of. For, indeed, any suggestions which can be made, however useful they may be, can only be of secondary assistance ; the most accurate following of instructions cannot of itself amount to a meditation. It is good to improve first one's informal consideration and reflection by means of greater reverence and care in approaching it, and thus to impress upon the mind the truth that a meditation is not a mechanical series of devotional acts to be performed in succession like Czerny's 101 exercises for the piano, but a spiritual experience in sonship and discipleship.

In the earlier portion of this reading some considerations were offered which, if unqualified, might be discouraging to the devout student. It was there implied, that to contemplate God steadily is not easy. But it is far from the intention of these papers to discourage any one who truly desires to reply with the psalmist to the invitation, " Seek ye My face." And, indeed, it not infrequently happens that at first Almighty God gives sensible pleasure in simple meditation, and then gradually provides the more strenuous discipline of difficulties

to be overcome in the way of dryness, heaviness of heart, and distraction. To the young He is often very generous; they offer Him the freshness of their lives, and He appreciates the gift and deals with them as with the young.

But it is not sensible satisfaction which is to be sought in meditation, as neither is it with sacramental communion; and one has no reason to complain if the benefits of a good practice are not immediately experienced. Fruits quickly matured are not of much worth. Yet the benefits are frequently looked for too soon, and in the wrong order. Some expect to experience spiritual elevation when they are but disciplining themselves to shut out the concerns of life and fix the mind upon God, forgetful that this training is of itself deserving of many a *laus Deo:* it is a very high grace to be humble in spiritual matters, even as it is to be persevering in them.

It is profitable to realise how much one needs to practise the presence of God, and to be assured that if the will be there He will provide the way. A great snare for some time may very possibly be that of thinking that one cannot meditate as one should. Please God, some day we shall know that we cannot, and shall be content. But he can meditate well enough to please God, who, just because He is his chief desire, and because he cannot live through the day without lifting up the heart to Him, will give Him his thoughts lest he become entangled in the multitude of worldly pursuits; and he too will meditate well enough to please God, who will offer Him the oblation of a humble and contrite heart, and ask Him to put some thoughts into the mind according to His blessed will.

## Chapter III

## ON THE USE OF THE IMAGINATION

OUTLINES of meditations after the text or subject often contain a second heading, which is called *Prelude ii.*, or *Picture*, or *Contemplate;* and then may follow either an illustration, such as a sunset, or a soldier on the battle-field, or more probably a biblical scene, as, for example, the family of Bethany, or the disciples in the cornfield, or David trying the armour of Saul. This outline is intended to be worked up in the mind, until it expands into a real scene, into the spirit of which one enters with such activity of the imagination as will suggest thoughts. It is this exercise which is now to be considered.

It is right that every child of God should offer his imagination to the Creator, even as he should offer Him the service of all the faculties with which He has blessed him. Not only so, but since all things that are seen are the symbols of unseen realities, he, who would endure as seeing the invisible, should strive so to see the visible that he perceives the invisible through it. To lift up the heart to God and to see Him in all His works is a matter worthy of much labour. "O Lord, how manifold are Thy works: in wisdom hast Thou made them all; the earth is full of Thy riches." And this would seem to be the more important in that Almighty God Himself is perceived by us through symbol.

But the imagination requires much cultivation, and therefore it is well to consider that we can never offer acceptably to God that which costs us nothing. It is true that one has often heard the expression idly used, "giving wings to the imagination," when all that is intended by it is a fanciful emptiness very far removed from any discipline or training of the imagination, or a setting of oneself to offer to God that which is a means of lifting up the heart to Him.

There are parables which come to every one in daily life: are they read? It is not only once that the hen gathered her brood under her wings, or that leaven was mixed in meal. St. Paul is not alone in having seen men build, in having thought of an army, considered an empire, and met men of business. It need not be left to psalmists to notice the trees planted by the river, to watch a thunderstorm, look up to the hills, or see a sunrise. We, too, may have our thoughts turned to the good God by daily sights, and may

learn as life advances that creation and history, and indeed all life, are His revelation, and that "the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead."

A friend has learned many spiritual lessons, he says, by studying the garden in which he works; and it is not only weeding, watering, pruning, planting, and digging which are full of symbolism. When Father Benson used to write his letters to *The Cowley Evangelist* from abroad, one knew from reading them that wherever he went the things which met his sight—Boston harbour, or a heathen festival in India—were pictures of a meditation. This is to be some day a great reward of steady perseverance in meditation; it comes from having the mind filled with God, not in idle imaginativeness, but in disciplined training, and through having Him as the mainspring of one's activities.

Now some are naturally imaginative, whom rougher people often call unpractical. To such dispositions the imagination may very easily be a snare; but every gift of God is a snare if it be not given back to Him in self-discipline. Such an one may find meditation of some sort very easy; starting off from some picture, he is carried away by an untrained imagination, and his thoughts are not profitable. A meditation is not an end in itself, and it is to be carefully distinguished here from the practice of mental dreaming. The end of meditation is the surrender of the will to God. To think idly and pleasantly about Him, while He is not brought into relationship with life, is an irreverence and a self-indulgence. The end of meditation is not even to think about God; that is only its beginning. Its end is to be possessed of God as the law of one's life. The imaginative person therefore greatly needs the self-discipline of his disposition in meditation that he may not idle away his life in sentiment or sigh.

More often the difficulty seems to lie, at any rate at first, in the opposite direction; the temptation is to think that one has no imagination, that one can never picture or see things. This will probably be found to be due to neglect of cultivation. An illustration from another sphere of the imagination's activity will speedily prove that there is no deficiency of the gift. Consider for a few moments how fertile is the imagination when one is suffering from a grievance; it can fancy anything; it will imagine slights which were not intended, and will enlarge upon them, spread them out, and encourage them until one is persuaded that another is calculating each

trifling movement with sole purpose to cause annoyance. In short, it is nearer to the truth to say that there is an inventive genius about an untrained imagination.

And who does not know the wild freaks of imagination when one submits to the indulgence of fancies, the idle task of day-dreams and the building of castles in the air? Or what is there that may be said, or indeed may not be said, as to the tricks which this same untrained imagination can play by night, when the tired will submits to be the sport of those thoughts which come unbidden and unchecked, and one roams at large through a whole universe of the unprofitable or the forbidden! In all these and similar cases the imaginative faculties, which God gave for use and not for abuse, are playing havoc in a dissipated manner, not by reason of their meagreness but rather in virtue of their unchecked abundance: and these endowments, which are frequently regarded as deficient for any good purpose, may by devout discipline be trained until the mind can see the sacramental aspect of life and reflect upon the Creator in the works of His hands.

While the spiritual cultivation of the imagination will both guard it from a riotous course and direct the mind to the contemplation of God, so that after a time He may be worshipped continually by this gift to our human nature, there is also a direct relation between this faculty and the task of meditating upon some words of Scripture or aspect of revealed truth; for the imagination acts upon the intellect and vivifies it. There are those who will read a book and find nothing in it; and there are others who will in such manner and with such vividness realise the scenes of it and throw the mind into them, that the characters of the book will stand out as living personalities, and for the time the reader will live as a companion among them. It is by this power of realisation that one understands history, not by any trick of the memory to hold a series of dates or succession of events; and history is the unveiling of the unchangeable mind of God through the variable course of human experience; in it may be seen the sequence of forces, which arise out of antecedents under the power of will, and which gradually spend themselves, making their effect for good or ill, and then pass away, after they have served God's will and illustrated His laws, leaving behind them new forces which they have generated and which in their turn are to contribute to the unfolding of the divine purpose.

More simply this power of the imagination may be marked in the impetus which it gives to the essay writer. Two

school-boys may be set a subject upon which to write ; the one bites his pen and can think of nothing, the other sets to work to make pictures in his mind ; he takes up his subject and looks closely at it, imagines it, throws himself into it, turns it over, until by degrees it comes real to him, and thoughts begin to flow. This is what a picture is intended to do with relation to a meditation ; at first, if one try to think, the subject of the meditation appears blank, but by degrees a situation is woven around it and it begins to attain life ; then, as the picture is further realised, thoughts are started.

Many biblical subjects are either associated with a historical context or are themselves pictures in the form of a symbol. A large portion of the Old Testament is history, and the Gospels abound in scenery and movement. The epistles are filled with passages which are symbolic pictures in outline ; thus the Church is referred to as a kingdom, a body, a household, a bride, and a temple ; and each title presents fresh aspects of an inexhaustible truth.

How, then, can a better start be made than by throwing oneself in imagination into one of the many Gospel scenes, mixing oneself in it, conjuring up the cornfield or the city gate or the boat on the lake, until the surroundings have been reproduced ? If the meditation be a parable, the picture has already been provided, and all that needs to be done is to draw it out somewhat in detail. For example, we see the two women grinding at the mill ; both seem alike, they are doing the same task, and that an every-day task, which we should call a piece of secular work ; such has been their routine for years ; they are good friends, and as neighbours and partners in house-work, they have been unconsciously influencing each the other day after day ; the same circumstances have moulded both. " The mills of God grind slowly " ; yes, very slowly, for 365 days in the year and for many years ; " but they grind exceedingly small," for now the one woman is taken and the other is left. Just left ; she has made the daily life her all, has lived entirely in the present, not evilly, but for time only ; and there she is, left for ever with her mill-stones, grinding. Is it not terrible, as one allows the picture to fix itself upon the mind ? Surely, there will be no difficulty now about a meditation upon this parable !

Or it may be a verse from the Old Testament which has been chosen out of one of the historical books ; and it is good to picture the scene in which it occurs, that the words, being realised in their original context, may yield their true lesson. Thus, " Let us now fall into the hand of the Lord, for His

mercies are great ; and let me not fall into the hand of man." This was very true for David, but it may not be true for everybody : David feared God, and although he had sinned he knew how to turn to God in humility and penitence ; in such a way it is far better to fall into His hands, for truly His mercies are great. But it would not be so for a hardened and impenitent sinner ; he may well fear to fall into the hand of God, lest he be crushed to dust by the divine righteousness. And in mercy he may be allowed to fall into the hand of man, who is God's agent, if, by the withholding of His direct visitation for a season, he may yet learn wisdom through the discipline of life, and find out how to put himself into the hand of God, so that at the last he may have learned to say, " Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit." Thus a commencement will be made by recalling the life of David in broad outline, until one's thoughts turn to the consideration of why it was good for him to speak thus, and why he could say so, and until we can see the sin of a good man and how he can repent, and that " though he fall he shall not be cast away, for the Lord upholdeth him with His hand."

In these two examples the passage has been made almost unconsciously from the use of the imagination to that of the reason in discursive thought, and the subject of the next chapter has been encroached upon. At a later stage it will be remarked that this is indeed a quite desirable thing to do, and that with more facility in the form of meditation, it will be found that one passes freely, without deliberate intention, from one exercise to another. Just now the illustrations may be taken as descriptive of the fruitfulness of a picture in suggesting thoughts and setting the mind to work.

It has been observed that frequently the words of Holy Scripture are symbolic ; in such cases the work of the imagination lies in the development of the simile. Should we not be led to think more freshly of the great deliverance which Jesus Christ has wrought for us in *Redemption*, if we began by thinking of the setting free of some slave, what his slavery had involved, who set him free, and why, how the slave might be supposed to feel towards his deliverer, what sort of man he might be expected to be at the moment of his being set free, what changes of character were to be hoped for if he were to enjoy his new condition of life ?

St. Paul says, " Quench not the spirit." Some, starting from these words, are speedily involved in the difficult contemplation of the sin against the Holy Ghost ; but the apostle has said, " Quench not." From this word the picture of fire

is suggested, and the various ways in which it may be put out, how it must be fed in order to be kept alive, and how it can be allowed gradually to die out from neglect, and then how it is only to be relighted by applying fresh fire, not from the cold and dead ashes, but from living fire which is burning elsewhere. Thus one may be led to think profitably how fire only burns by consuming, how too it purifies and warms; perhaps some will think of the fire upon the altar, which lighted at first by fire from heaven, was never to go out by night or day, being continually preserved by renovation.

This illustration of St. Paul's words from the language of the Old Testament will serve to introduce another consideration. Theological students are supposed to be familiar with the history of Israel, and with the religious ceremonies of the old covenant and their significance. Recent years have wrought a great change in the treatment of Jewish history, and it is important to know whether the records of the Old Testament are still, in any proper understanding of the word, a part of our Bible, or whether they have been relegated to the sphere of archæological interest together with the legends of early Rome.

This problem is too large to be solved here, but it has a direct bearing on the subject in hand. The Scriptures of the Jews, those of which our Divine Master said that "they are they which testify of Me," are not intended to be only "introduction" and "criticism" to His disciples, as neither are they the mere store-house of information of the Huppim and Muppim order. The modern student fearlessly facing the truth, in the conviction that it always leads to fuller light, must remember in this case that he is not facing the whole truth if he let the Spirit of God's living word die out from neglect to use it devotionally.

The daily lessons together with the Psalter will provide many subjects for meditation.* The children of Israel in the wilderness despised their monotonous life, because they did not understand its purpose; and they forgot their deliverance from Egypt, and became indifferent to the pillar of cloud and fire, the manna, and the worship in the Tent of Meeting. What are they but our fellow pilgrims? "Yea, they thought scorn of that pleasant land, and gave no credence unto His word; but murmured in their tents, and hearkened not unto

* Any references in this book to the daily lessons are taken from the old lectionary. Readers following the new lectionary will find for themselves many similar suggestions.

the voice of the Lord" (Ps. for 21st Evg. cp. Deut. xi. 21-25, 1st Lesson for Evg. for March 21).

The whole interpretation of our lives may be found in the history of this chosen people. Brought out from the slavery of Egypt, baptised in the Red Sea, led by the light of God, fed by the sacramental manna, we too are being disciplined out of our old slave character, and prepared for Canaan with its corn and wine. Like the Israelites, we often sigh for the fleshpots of Egypt, its strong garlic and onions, and despise this light food. We are bidden go up and view the land in meditation, which we are to inherit, and we come back discouraged. Or, the children of Israel have entered Canaan, and our point of view is changed in the daily lessons for April; we realise that we are already translated into the heavenly kingdom, and we wonder why we feel so unlike heavenly citizens, until we study the discipline of Canaan upon the Israelites. The Epistle to the Hebrews will shew how large a portion of the earlier books may be used, and the writings of the prophets interpret the history of the monarchy.

No suggestions have been offered as to making the picture when the subject of meditation does not suggest it. This is a more difficult matter, and it is wiser to acquire experience in the exercise before attempting its more advanced forms. Perseverance will give greater facility, and by degrees the practice will become of great help in meditation, as well as a valuable discipline and training of the mind to read the pictures of one's daily life. Meanwhile it must not be supposed that these elementary suggestions are going at once to make meditation easy. Meditation is never easy. But use these suggestions, so far as you have read them, and for the present continue to make your meditations in your own way.

In the evening the subject is chosen, or perhaps a suggestion which came during the day's work or evensong, or a verse from the psalms at matins, has been treasured up for this purpose. Now is the time to turn it over a little in the mind, to see a picture outlined in the words or in their context; the meditation is commended to God, and the anticipation of the morning's thoughts rest in the mind until sleep comes. At the fixed hour in the morning, and in the chosen place, you are ready; there is no distraction of unpreparedness; you kneel down, make the opening acts and prayers slowly and thoughtfully, recognising that the meditation is already begun, and that you are in the presence of God.

Then recall the subject, a slight exercise of the memory made more easy by the association of it with a picture which is waiting to be developed.

And now perhaps, you can do nothing more; the picture unaccountably refuses to produce itself on the retina of the mind. This may very likely happen; the subject chosen was too difficult, or you have not yet had much experience in the treatment of the illustration, and the imagination is untrained. Perhaps you give up the picture and start thinking, being disappointed that what seemed so easy when you were reading about it yesterday should now prove to be difficult; probably you are disappointed, and do not yet realise that the permanent value of this way of treating a meditation is largely dependent upon the pains taken to acquire proper control and development of the imaginative faculty. But consider whether this failure in a meditation may not be God's answer to your introductory prayers. It is good to fail; it is humbling, and helps to make one feel how unspiritual one is, and how soon one tires of thinking about the things of God. And yet the great difficulty which one finds in this exercise may well be a measure of one's need of it.

Some years ago the writer was in a German university town and went to the bathing shed, through which the river was running swiftly. The deceptive resemblance to an English swimming bath deceived him. Jumping in at the lower end he found to his chagrin that he could not move, and was being knocked against the wooden barriers. Soon he found a very pleasant recreation. Running along the side of the bath to its upper end he got in, and let himself be carried down by the force of the current. He needed to use no exertion; arms and legs went through the correct movements, and the river did the rest. But his swimming did not improve. Then he set to work. Getting in about half-way down he determined to swim up-stream. After some attempts he found that it was a longer time before he was dragged down to the end of the bath. At last he was just able to hold his own. Before he left the town he was able with much effort to swim up the river for about half the length of the bath. But the students of the place and many of the schoolboys were able, and apparently with ease, to do the whole length.

## Chapter IV

## ON THINKING

OF the various exercises of a meditation this one, which is now to be considered, is probably the greatest snare. Some seem afraid of the work of the intellect, supposing that great or original thoughts are required. Others are self-satisfied, or, carried away by their reflections, meditate indeed, but lose the full advantages of their meditation. They rest content with their thoughts and do not go on to lift up their hearts to God in unity of mind, will and affection. This latter danger need not be exploited, seeing that no one who suffers from its temptation is likely to be found reading an elementary treatise. But as it is not improbable that some, who now are beginners, will in the future suffer from undue intellectualism in their meditations, it may not be amiss to provide a warning by anticipation.

When one has reached a condition in which he finds this devotion easy, and he is satisfied that he can meditate well, let him ask God to save him from spiritual pride. And let him see to it that he is not substituting high thoughts and difficult speculation for the lifting up of the heart to God in aspiration and humility. These temptations, on the one hand to discouragement, and on the other to take pleasure in one's success, should in no way surprise us. "My son, if thou come to serve the Lord, prepare thy soul for temptation. Set thy heart aright, and constantly endure, and make not haste in time of trouble. Whatsoever is brought upon thee, take cheerfully, and be patient when thou art changed to a low estate."

We will enter into the subject of this chapter in a simple spirit, approaching it through an easy illustration. It is not improbable that you have at some time had a Sunday school class. Consider how you prepared your lesson, if you prepared it properly. First, early in the week, the subject for next Sunday was found in the lesson book; that was the book of meditation outlines. Then, having read the lesson, it was allowed to simmer in the mind, while you began to mingle it with your prayers, asking the good God to show you how to make it interesting and useful. This involved the work of the memory and the preparatory prayers. Then, about the middle of the week, the subject began to be worked up so that it might be presented to the children in an attractive

form. The scene of the lesson was conjured up in the mind, and was clothed with illustration within the range of the children's experience. Then the scene was expanded and filled in with detail, it was modernised without being vulgarised, until at length you were satisfied that the children would get some idea of reality. All that was the work of the imagination aided by the intellect.

Now what next? For this was not sufficient preparation for a good lesson. The subject had to be drawn out, and there was something to be brought home to the children's minds. Perhaps you wished to impress upon them that God looks for Christian pluck in His young people; or that He does not desert us when we think Him to be dealing hardly with us; or you would teach them that God is holy, and so His people must be holy too, or they will not remain with Him. But perchance it is a festival, and you have had the harder task of telling your class about the Holy Ghost or the doctrine of the Blessed Trinity. You could not go to school prepared to talk dogmatic abstractions to them; but by applying the dogma practically you have tried to impress it persuasively upon the mind. All this necessitates a good deal of thinking, if the lesson is to be well brought home; and it amounts to an elementary form of what is known as "the work of the intellect" in the exercise of meditation.

A subject has been chosen, it has been expanded and vivified by drawing out the illustration in the mind, until now it means a little more than it did last night; you are becoming interested in it. But, of course, something more substantial than this is desired; perhaps a lesson lurks in the words, and that is why they struck your attention originally, although you were scarcely conscious that they contained such a message. So now you think. You do not start by forcing thoughts into the words, but from the picture you are led on gradually to see more clearly what the words mean just as they were said or written. Then perhaps you put yourself into the picture, and so bring the words home; or, it is not yourself, but St. Paul or another who is in the mental picture, and his circumstances are to be thought of, until you realise to a little degree, but rather more than you have hitherto realised, the wonderful conviction which sustained the man of God, and the intense reality of his life.

But to-day, perhaps, the subject attracts in another way, and your self is not dragged in by painful consciousness of distance from the apostle's experience. Let it be so; there is no need to drag oneself in; it is God, or God in Jesus Christ,

or the things of God, or some truth about God, or the great fact of a spiritual world, which is in the mind. This is excellent; a meditation is not another form of self-examination, or of introspection; it is an exploring of God, an inspection of His realm. "Looking off unto Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith," is a very good motto for a meditation, whereby it becomes a breath of fresh air on a dull day. You are not looking out for startling and original thoughts to be put into a treatise on the philosophy of Christianity. You are only a common soldier, and will be content to emulate the troops of Julius Cæsar, when the battle was against them. It is recorded of them that when they heard the general's voice and saw him in the front line, they rose from the ground where they had fallen, and fought boldly, despite their sword-thrusts, anxious to show their courage in the face of the leader.

Thus it may be that the courage of the saints is to-day's subject. One need not turn in upon self and consider how poor a saint one is; but rather is it profitable to ask why the saints were so courageous. Then the thought comes from the picture of the battle, that it was because they saw their general always before them and knew that His presence meant victory; or it was because they so worshipped Him that they could follow Him anywhere, even to death. Perhaps the fascination which Napoleon could exercise over his troops comes into the mind, and you perceive that here is a personal attraction beside which the illustration of Napoleon seems a blasphemy. Such thoughts indeed are not very recondite; but why should they be? It is a settled matter now that a meditation is a consideration of God, and a getting into conscious touch with Him.

Perhaps at times you scarcely know when the picture is finished and the thinking begins; the two have blended, and you are in truth working out one corner of a picture and thinking about it. This will be all the better; a meditation is not to be divided rigidly into parts. It is one of the disadvantages of talking or writing about this subject that the impression is given that it is a series of disconnected portions, one of which must be finished before the next is begun. Some try to make a picture, and then say to themselves that now this is done with and they can get on with their meditation; and so almost the whole benefit of the picture is lost, and that which was to help thinking, by illuminating the mind, has, as it were, been suddenly switched off, leaving the mind again in darkness to grope its way.

A good illustration is a thing to return to, a pivot on which the whole meditation turns ; when the mind stands still, one must go back to the picture, work it up again, develop another part of it, and carry away a fresh thought.

And a meditation is not a task, but the enjoyment of God's society. There is no need of great thoughts for the enjoyment of companionship. Indeed, we are not really at ease in the presence of anyone if we have to strain ourselves to think cleverly. It is the sense of being understood without explanation, the knowledge that there is no need to produce an effect, which gives real companionship. We pass, however, to a higher region of fellowship when we contemplate that of the Master and His disciple. Is it not so that the Giver of all spiritual life understands His humble companion, and that the pupil in the school of Christ may trust his Master not only with his grievances, ambitions and disappointments, but also with those yearnings, aspirations and experiences which cannot find expression? It is written of Him that He perceived the disciples' thoughts as they were walking by the way ; and He is not other now than we have read of in the Gospels. Meditation on the Gospel scene will greatly help us to realise the Master's knowledge of us.

Outlines of thoughts for meditation are commonly worked out in threes. If the scheme is very brief, there will be just three suggestions ; if the scheme be a fuller one, there will likely be three main divisions, each expanded into three subdivisions. This division is solely a matter of convenience, to give the meditant a choice of thoughts ; it is not intended that he should work solidly through them all, but that he should use the one which seems to attract him, and if possible pass on from it into a quite different thought from any suggested in the book. He loses nothing by not following the scheme in detail ; he loses well nigh everything if he makes himself the slave of what was intended to be his servant.

It is, of course, quite reasonable that in making his picture he shall have in mind one or other of the suggested thoughts on which he hopes to meditate, and that he should try to work up the picture along the lines which such thoughts suggest, so that he may get easily into his subject. This indeed is making a good use of the picture ; but, once started, all apparatus is a mere help, and if it do not help it should be dropped ; it must never be allowed to hinder. But while beginners may often be compelled to follow the provided hints somewhat closely, these remarks are made that they

may learn from the first to avoid the error of thinking that what they want to do is to follow up such and such a sketch from the book of outlines. This is what they may have to do for a time, but what they will strive after is to make their own meditation outlines. Even from the first it is good for a man to make at least one meditation a week from a subject which he has chosen for himself. The gospel for the week will certainly provide all that is needed ; and if it seem to offer suggestions for several days the book of meditations can be laid aside.

In no case should one check the flow of thoughts out of any feeling of loyalty to the book which is being used, or because it is natural to suppose that the suggestions are really better than those which have come independently into the mind. Remember that at the opening of the meditation the Holy Spirit was invoked, Who inspires thought ; trust Him. Let point two and point three go altogether unheeded if point one suffice, and drop even point one if a new thought present itself. But if, as may well be the case, the first thought does not prove productive, go back to the picture and work it up round point two ; this is one of the advantages of having several suggestions.

Beginners often seem to themselves to suffer from a paucity of thoughts, because they have not acquired freedom of movement. At this stage they may be helped by having various suggestions, and may even on occasions be glad to pass through them all, just getting a little from each, taking up the next thought through a return to the picture, always ready to stop, always ready to depart from the outline as soon as another thought is found in the mind. Freedom of movement is the principle, slavery to the letter is the snare. It is more probable, nevertheless, that the beginner will suffer from disregarding his thoughts as not sufficiently good, as being too insignificant for a meditation, than from real paucity of thought ; and against this he should be on his guard.

With these warnings one may safely pass on to a few special suggestions. They are not rules as to the way in which certain types of meditation require to be treated ; they are merely hints which may prove of some help. Rules, indeed, there cannot be ; a meditation is not an arithmetic sum ; one will treat it in one way and one in another. The hints to be offered are by way of helping the beginner to make his own outlines ; and at times he may like to apply some of these suggestions to meditation subjects which have been provided for him in a book.

(1) Many short subjects, especially those which present a dramatic situation, can be well brought out in a simple way by a series of questions. If the words are, "The Lord turned and looked upon Peter," the picture will be a sketch of the scene in the Priest's palace, figuring to oneself the chief characters, and a typical group, recalling to memory the apostle's confident boast, the warning which he received, the divine prayer for him, and then his hasty defence of his Master, and his subsequent denial of Him. Then one might proceed in such a way as this. Who is it that turned? Why did He turn? How did He know what Peter had said? How could He be thinking of Peter in the anxiety of His trial? And, "He turned." From whom? What a scene! The Judge of the whole world facing the High Priest, the ruler of God's people! And to whom did He turn? A disciple; one for whom He had prayed, whom He had warned, who had been confident. What a turning! From false Caiaphas to weak Peter; from His judgement of Caiaphas to His appeal to the disciple. "And looked." What was in that look? How did Peter interpret it? What did it recall? "Upon Peter," standing in the corner, shrinking in his shame, yet unable to keep away, denying with his lips, while his presence denied his denial. What misery! What was the result? Turn to Easter day, turn to the scene on the shores of the lake, turn to the apostle's history after Pentecost, turn to his Epistle. All that in the Lord's look.

(2) This illustration suggests another hint. Many short texts are best thought about if each word is taken separately. For example, "The light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ" makes its own divisions. "Light" is the picture; then "Gospel." What is that word for us Christians? And now "the Glory of Christ"; the picture of light is seen to be the effulgence of glory, and the consideration is of the Gospel as the manifestation of His glory. Or, with the words, "Ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy," we may do the same, adding merely the context of the eve of the Passion and Easter. We picture the disciples when they realised their Master's departure; that suffices for "sorrowful." Then the Easter revelation for "joy"; and the sorrow turned into joy is perceived to be not a new joy substituted for the old sorrow and so effacing its impression, but the actual sorrow changed into the joy, in such way that the joy could not have been without the sorrow.

Other subjects invite a slightly different treatment, and bid us take them clause by clause. In this way trial may be

made of the verse Deut. viii. 16, where the word "manna" gives the picture. We draw out a scheme of the Israelites in the wilderness going out daily, in the early morning, to pick up the heaven-sent food, which a Divine providence has given for daily sustenance. The scene will be drawn out with all that emphasises the parallel with our communions. Then come four clauses, giving a series of headings for considerations. "Which thy fathers knew not." Here we may think of the special bounty which God has bestowed upon us in these days, and should stir up our hearts to appreciate it more heartily, that we may live as those who are thus nourished with peculiar care. Or we might be reproached by the words; our father verily did not know; but we know, and yet, alas! do not know, because we do not care to know. "That He might humble thee"; it presents the discipline of the communicant's life, dependent upon God, living on food which the world regards as superstitious and unintelligible to reasonable men, yet so simple as to offer no temptation to pride. "And that He might prove thee," whether Israel would tire of it and yearn for Egypt's fleshpots, or whether they would value it and persevere happily in its use, reverencing it so as to obey its conditions. "To do thee good at thy latter end"; the communicant must not look for immediate and sensible profit; his mind is fixed on the goal; heavenly food for a heavenly life, in preparation for a future. And yet, "to do thee good"; there are present fruits of a good Communion.

(3) The Gospel for the week will often lend itself to another form of treatment, when taken as a whole. The incident will provide the picture, and first, one will think of the Gospel and interpret it quite literally, aided possibly by interrogations. By paying heed to the situation one may see something which has hitherto escaped one's attention, or may refresh oneself with a familiar thought. There is no reason why a meditation must always be a new one; old ones sometimes lend themselves to new thoughts, or old thoughts may be carried on somewhat further. Or a meditation may be begun one day and continued on another day.

Then one will begin to see the universal truth in the particular circumstance; the crowds will become the curious world, which is half interested in Christ, yet it is not ready to become His disciple. What is He saying to them now? What does this Gospel teach about that interesting question of the world's ease of mind in ignoring Him?

Then, having applied the Gospel to the world, we may

consider the disciples as representing the faithful, and learn encouragement or warning, or see in the slowness of the twelve a lesson of patience with the imperfections of the Church. Or, we may put ourselves into the scene, and picture ourselves first with the crowd, then with the disciples, and then, if it be a miracle, identify ourselves with the sick man. Then we shall think of Him, on another day, as the healer of the diseases of men, and of this miracle as illustrating particular aspects of spiritual diseases and spiritual ministering thereto. Or the Pharisees are introduced, and they become the religious world, and we learn a good deal in that way in sympathy with the mind of God.

If the gospel be a parable it provides in itself a group of meditations in outline. If the scene be from the Passion it may be thought of as it occurred historically, then as being continually renewed, and we shall see Jesus Christ, now as then, silently judging while He is being judged; and lastly, we may turn the scene upon ourselves, first to find ourselves contributing to His Passion, and afterwards, perhaps, as His disciple, walking in His steps, to see wherein we share this experience and how it can be said of us that "the disciple is not above his Master." Thus while the Gospel scenes vary greatly, and each one will suggest its own treatment, and that not the same to different people, we may well have such guiding principles of interpretation as the scene, the world and the Church; or the scene, the disciples and myself; or Jesus Christ, society and the individual.

(4) Somewhat in this way the Epistles may be considered. First historically; this is certainly the best starting point. Probably the words which have arrested our attention are symbolic, so that the simile will be worked out as the picture, and its appositeness appreciated. For a first thought one will try to understand what the writer was thinking of, why he wrote as he did to this particular Church, being sure that in this letter he had something quite definite to say in order to meet a quite definite situation, and probably something which, at least unconsciously, reflects his own frame of mind, circumstances, or history.

Then, in the next place may be an application. Is Corinth altogether a situation which has passed away? Is there nothing to-day of a superficially intellectual Christianity which is touched but very slightly in heart, and consents rather with the head only, and to which the Cross is altogether a stumbling-block? Or Galatia? Do we know nothing now of a Christianity which wishes to justify itself,

which makes a legalism of the Gospel, and substitutes a ceremonial observance for the consecration of the heart? Is there nothing of this in ourselves?

No doubt the Epistles are more difficult than the Gospels, unless indeed it is merely a simile which we are working out like a parable, as when St. Paul says, "Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked," or when St. James talks of the tongue (chap. iii.); but even so, light will be found in the circumstances. Thus when St. Paul says, "For I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus," we shall not fail to observe the reference to the circumcision controversy in the Galatian Epistle, his own bodily infirmities and persecutions from which he suffered in that province, and the terrible anxieties which had been crowding upon him when he wrote this letter. So too, if we know anything of the mystical writings, we may be caught by the word *stigmata;* or at any rate we shall think of the branded slave and the branded soldier, perhaps also of the devotee, and most certainly of the mark of the Lord Jesus impressed upon each baptised servant and soldier.

This use of the Epistles in meditation may be made very profitable to the theological student, whose business it is to know something of the Epistles as a whole; to study them word by word in the Greek and to mark the sequence of thought; who beneath the immediate is desirous to seize the permanent lesson; who can never forget that he is not reading old-world controversies, but modern problems. And while study helps to provide a full apparatus for meditation, it is the meditation itself which will light up the page of Scripture and throw life into the study of it.

(5) These general remarks suggest also how useful it is to consider an epistle as a whole, reading it through first, and then going over it to choose marked passages and verses for a series of meditations. And in thus reading an epistle, the corresponding portion of the Acts of the Apostles will be read with it, if it be one of St. Paul's earlier writings.

Sometimes, of course, there will be much disappointment, there will seem to be no progress, and it will be as if a terrible worldly-mindedness must be weighing down the soul. Quite likely such is the case, but even so there is no need to despair over it; and it is better not to pay much attention to the lack of progress, but rather to suspect that the worry which the thought produces is only a form of spiritual pride. Perseverance is more important than success, and a lesson in

humility and failure makes a very good fruit of meditation. On some days there may quite possibly be an utter failure; thoughts refuse to come, the spirit seems bound, and there is nothing for it but to give up the attempt. In such a case, make your prayers, do not give up until you have asked help of God, and have tried again, beginning with the picture and seeking to pursue a new thought; then if nothing can be done, rather than worry over it, lay it entirely aside and quite cheerfully. Others have had to do so before you. But before rising renew your acts of the Divine presence, dwell in silence upon that for as long as you patiently can, whisper to Him your failure and tell Him that you are not disheartened, and that although you cannot meditate to-day, it has been good to be here.

## Chapter V

## ON CONVERSE

A FEW thoughts have been offered hitherto upon the concentration of will, memory, imagination and intelligence upon God, and as yet the choicest part of a meditation has not been approached. In the last chapter an exceedingly elementary aspect of meditation was considered not from any desire to discourage deep thinking, but because it seemed reasonable to suppose that those, whose intellectual life would lead them in that direction naturally, might be safely left to themselves, and that others would more probably be helped by simple suggestion and by assurance that the spiritual benefit was not dependent upon the greatness of the thoughts. Whether this reflection is a satisfactory explanation of the fact that little was there attempted beyond proposals for handling various topics, and dividing them, may be left unconsidered, since a sufficient solution is to be found in the writer's inability to offer assistance to other than elementary students of the practice of meditation.

In this chapter an attempt is to be made to apply to the emotions, feelings and affections a treatment somewhat similar to that which was given to the work of the imagination. It is quite certain that the emotional endowment is not without its true usefulness, and that it is not, alone of the gifts of God to us, to be left to go as it pleases, and to have no recognised place in the complex experience of meditation.

We are, of course, quite aware of such useful warnings as not to pay much attention to the feelings; we know that we must do what is right, whether we feel inclined or not; we must forgive our enemies even if we do not like doing so; we are sure that it is quite possible to love God without having any very acute sensations, that the test of love is obedience, that a good conscience does not depend on the state of the emotions, that sensible experiences in religion, so far as they are genuine, belong to the liberality of God in granting or withholding, and either way for our good, and that when not genuine they are the sport of our own temperament and state of mind or body, a will-o'-the-wisp very liable to lead to mischief.

Is it not, therefore, best to leave the feelings severely alone, to disregard them, perhaps almost to despise them, at any rate to take them as they come, be thankful if they are what

they should be, ignore them if they are not? And yet the fact remains that in the properly balanced life feelings should move harmoniously with experience and should be under proper control. We ought to feel angry at sin, if we hate it; we ought to feel that we love God, if we do love Him, saving when He sends a special dryness into the soul.

One main reason why the feelings are so variable, and often contrary to the will, is just that we neglect and despise them, instead of training them, disciplining them, and subjecting them to authority. Here, therefore, is another great field for cultivation. Why is God to be deprived of the fervour of worship, and the elevation of the spirit? Does He not love the enthusiasm of the young, the heartiness of the strong, the affection of the loving? And in offering to Him the consecrated and disciplined powers of the affections we are at the same time training as servant what is very dangerous if allowed to become master or left to be a wanderer.

It is a difficult thing to talk of loving God, because there is danger of seeming to suggest the substitution of an emotion for a principle; and yet the subject is so important, and is so closely related to the difficulty which we find in making meditations, that a few words are almost requisite. Love may be more adequately expressed as a purpose than a feeling. And yet while the will has an important function to fulfil in love, the mainspring lies behind the will in that which moves it. Love begins in a response, made consciously or unconsciously; it is the answer of one's being to God. Its purpose—the desire to correspond to God's will—is its first substantial manifestation. The following of the purpose is the growth of love.

The proper relation, therefore, of the meditation to the love of God is the strengthening of purpose by the consideration of Him, knowing that the more we study Him the more we shall desire Him. It is not the direct purpose of every meditation that we should feel that we love Him more. Very likely we ought not to feel and cannot feel that we love Him more, until our purpose is stronger and more matured. And we can easily realise that if, being what we are, we could feel more strongly that we loved Him, we should incur the serious danger of reliance upon exalted feelings quite out of harmony with our spiritual attainment. Or, we might be so elevated at one moment that by reaction we should be cast into despair at another.

These remarks are not, however, all that can be said with regard to loving God and the consideration of our medita-

tions. As the purpose of obeying God grows in our lives we ought to know that we love Him, and there ought to be growth in the emotions appropriate to that love. And in this matter meditations should help, partly because therein we give ourselves to consider why we should love God, and partly because we are therein to train our neglected faculties, including all our affections, and to bring them into harmony with our purposes, and above all because therein we commune with God.

But it is a great mistake to suppose that in the work of the affections in meditation we are only concerned with the feeling of love towards God. The affections are varied, although they are all related to the central law of loving God. We are naturally very much afraid of our feelings because we have not tried to guide them, and because we are apt to think of them apart from the will, and therefore as tending to be volatile, and also because we associate with the feelings too exclusively the more sentimental expressions of affection. Let us, however, now consider that we have in mind such affections as hatred of sin, fear of offending Almighty God's holiness, love of His people, sorrow for sin, yearning after holiness, sympathy with sinners, love for the souls of men, desire for God's house, reverence for His word, devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, a wholesome fear of death, ardent devotion to Jesus Christ, to be moved by the consideration of His Passion, to take pleasure in helping others.

These affections are very varied, and they are all fruits growing from the love of God. There is not one of them which does not need cultivating by practice ; there is not one of them in which the exercises of a meditation should not prove of assistance, nor is there one the genuine influence of which would not be an aid to holy life ; there is probably not one which is not capable of abuse if it be encouraged as a sensation and not exercised according to the will of God.

If the requirement of training be recognised, and also the need of great caution, one's first duty is to think of Almighty God more strenuously. He is to become the motive power of our whole being, and we must yield ourselves unreservedly to Him in will. This is an essential part of the discipline of meditation, and in it the sluggish heart must be stirred up, coldness must be warmed, fervour increased ; and we must acquire deeper conviction of sin and a loftier conception of the claims of God upon us. And as was found to be true of the imagination, so here also the training of the affections

is at the same time a direct aid to meditation. It is not knowledge that is wanted in meditation so much as the realisation of experience and the submission of will.

The thoughts which are now to be suggested belong to the very centre of our subject. There are various reasons for placing them so late, but among them is certainly not that of their secondary importance; nor is it to be supposed, because they have been kept back until now, that these suggestions are intended only for use at the end of a meditation. They should be applied at every stage, and scarcely a thought should be allowed to enter the mind without being taken up into direct communing with God. Picture, thought, speech, these like three strands are to be laced together in the whole network.

For the last time, therefore, in this treatise let there be a reminder of the true significance of this spiritual task; in meditation we are to know what at other times we only try to get hold of; we reach out now to God with the whole energy of our being, and not only with the intellect; will, memory, thought, imagination, fervour, all combine in this interview. "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth." "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" In prayer we speak to God; in meditation He also speaks to us; prayer in some of its higher experiences passes into meditation.

Meditation also contains prayer, somewhat informally, at times not vocally; intimate and frank speech takes the place of petition; or aspiration may find expression in ejaculation. And God, on His part, will speak to the soul which lies open to Him, and which is ready to hear His voice. Be not afraid: He speaks to do good, even though at times His word frightens us by its severity or by the demands He makes upon us. The disciples feared as they entered into the cloud; the cloud of the Holy Ghost overshadows us as we get up into the mount in meditation, and see the Son transfigured as He shines with the eternal glory of His majesty. We too may well fear, only we must not hold back.

What has been hinted at in this reading may seem to be beyond the scope of an elementary consideration of formal meditation, and may even provoke criticism. One may say, so it can easily be imagined, that he cannot force himself to invent colloquies with God, to make up sentences as though they were spontaneous, still less can he compose replies as though they came from God. In answer to this difficulty, which will almost certainly be felt at first, remember to begin

in a very lowly way and yet as a Christian. Be assured that God is waiting to help you, and that if you begin with the utterances which seem to you least strained, and surrender yourself to the spirit of meditation, you will gradually be led on.

The simplest beginning is probably with ejaculation. The meditation is upon the Lord enthroned in glory. Look at Him, pause until you have some idea of the scene in the mind; then say, "My God, how wonderful Thou art." Or, it is His holiness which overpowers you, and the thought that sin is intolerable to Him. Is there nothing that you wish to say to Him at this stage? Does not something struggle to get itself expressed? Then say it. "God, be merciful to me a sinner"; or, "I thank Thee, O God, that Thou hast given me a Saviour."

Or perhaps the meditation is upon a scene in our Lord's life; you may be considering His gentleness, His fearless truthfulness, His insight into human character, His scathing irony, His pity, His love for sinners. Then tell Him what you think; talk to Him in shy phrases. "Lord Jesus, give me Thy gentleness, I am so rough." "Oh, divine Truth, teach me Thy way; give me courage to be true; make me afraid to act the lie." "Thou hast searched me out and known me; good Lord, what Thou hast seen, I dare not think." "I fear Thee when I hear Thee speak; Thou seest all my hypocrisy and littleness." "Have pity upon me, Lord Jesus; I am very weak." "When I am tempted to sin may I remember Thy love for sinners."

Surely it is not difficult after a little practice, and not at any time unreal, to say such words; and it is very good to acquire even this degree of freedom of speech with God. Why should we be tongue-tied with Him, Who knoweth the very secrets of the heart?

It is this personal speech which, introduced into a meditation, lifts it up from being an exercise of the brain into the directing of the whole being in openness of heart towards God. If we begin with ejaculation and whispered prayer of aspiration, we shall find after a time that we can make further progress in speech. And the aspiration is not always to be penitential, although from time to time we shall be greatly deepened in this way in our life of penitence, and God will reveal greater knowledge of sin as we are able to bear it. But at other times we shall tell Him of our hopes and aims, our ambitions in His service; we shall give Him our hearts again and again, and renew our fervour. "Ah!

my God, I would serve Thee like that." "I give Thee my heart again." "If it be Thy will grant me my desire, to serve Thee among the heathen." "Oh! my God, make me to love Thee more and more; my heart is so cold."

When by this means some progress has been made, by penetrating thereby into the secrets of meditation, an attempt will be made to begin short colloquies. It was said that we must enter into this task very humbly, but as Christians. In that last word there was the consideration that Jesus Christ is in the heart of a Christian to direct his thoughts, to help him in his converse with Himself, and that the Holy Ghost has been specially invoked, whose office towards us includes that of helping us to express our inner feelings. Therefore, when something is said to Almighty God in a meditation, there should be a spirit of expectancy to hear His answer. We have the mind of Christ; we know what the mind of God is towards us. Lift up the heart boldly to Him, and the reply which suggests itself will be that which He has to say to us. It gives great expansion of the heart to God, and enables us to realise very intimately that we are face to face with Him.

It is Friday, and the subject of meditation to-day is the Sacred Passion.

*My Lord, and my God, just now I feel as if I could never grieve Thee again, by sinning; but I know that I shall forget Thee when sudden temptation comes.*

My child, if to overcome sin were so easy, my Passion had been lighter.

*Yes, Lord, I can see how terrible is the strength of sin; but truly I do not wish to sin, and yet it overcomes me.*

Then, my child, you can always look up to Me and tell Me that you did not really mean it.

*Oh! but that is so shameful, to go on sinning as though I had not seen Thee in Thy Passion.*

My child, for whom I died, do you think that I do not know what you mean, and how you are overcome? Trust to the power of My Cross; slowly it will conquer in you, as you learn to feel it in yourself, when you turn to Me after you have forgotten Me.

Or, the subject is the love of God for sinners as illustrated by the parable of the Good Shepherd in search for the lost sheep. Here you are surprised almost against your will to find yourself facing this thought:

*I am a priest (or I am hoping soon to be a priest), and yet I seem scarcely to have any love for souls. What does it mean?*

My servant, this is a high thing for which you ask; seek to acquire it by learning My love to thyself. Hast thou thought enough about that?

*Nay, Lord; I have not; but is it not selfish to think too much about myself?*

My child, I said, "Think of Me and My love"; let that suffice thee, and I will direct thy way.

*Amen; give me grace to commit all my ways to Thee, and do Thou guide me.*

Or, once more; it is Quinquagesima, and the thoughts have turned naturally to love, God's love, love to God, love to the brethren.

*O God! Thy love to me is wonderful. Why do I love Thee so little? I almost hesitate to say that I really love Thee at all.*

Child of My love, I love thee; and that is far more important; but be not afraid to tell Me of thy little love. How can it be otherwise at present?

*But how shall I get to love Thee?*

Patience, My beloved! the work of grace is scarcely begun; thou hast suffered so little as yet. But I will tell thee one thing; think more of My love, value it more, and thou wilt grow in love without knowing it.

*Ah, my God! make me to love Thee.*

My child, it is the gift of God; seek to do My will, and thou shalt be rewarded. Begin now by loving Me in My children.

Perhaps these few examples may suffice to illustrate in some degree how right Christian feelings may be encouraged in meditation, and how this direct converse with God will make the meditation, in the right use of the word, personal; not in the sense that all the meditation will be occupied with oneself, but in the way that the thoughts, whatever they may be, have the effect of lifting up the heart to God. Perhaps you are contemplating the angels as they fly to and fro before the presence of God, thinking of them as the swallows who have built their nests round His very altar. It is not needful to leave the angels and to pass to oneself, because you pause for a moment to say:

*Grant me grace to live in Thy presence.*

*Give Thine angels charge over me.*

*As Thine angels do Thee service in heaven, so grant me to be Thy minister upon earth.*

**My servant, for thou too art this as well as they, learn from the contemplation of the holy angels the secret of true service.**

*Yes, Lord, I will try to take to heart the lessons which they teach me.*

At first, without doubt, we stammer very much in speech, and are inclined to give up the attempt. It is the most difficult part of a meditation, because it goes deepest, and makes the most serious demand. There will be times when we shall be sorely tempted to return to the old way of intellectual study. But below thoughts there are depths of inner consciousness, wellsprings of the life, difficult to reach, and which when reached are very serious.

The effects of meditation are varied; something has been said of the discipline of disappointment and failure; it is fitting now to give heed to other experiences. Often indeed a meditation will be very placid; we may feel a little brighter, God will have helped us on the way by lifting up the light of His countenance upon us. Sometimes He will explain a difficulty to us; we may understand at this time things which hitherto we have not seen; we shall catch glimpses at times of that far-stretching land; the trials and sorrows of life will be illuminated so as to be seen as the path which leads home to God; the power of Christ will no longer be altogether

external to us. We shall even dare to see things at times which we cannot safely venture to express ; " See thou tell no man " will be upon the meditation. But these are not every-day experiences. St. Paul at least once heard unspeakable words ; but you and I are not St. Paul. Above all things do not strain after experiences. What the good God sees fit for us, that He will give to us, if we be single-minded, and, which follows from this, if we be humble and penitent.

At times we may find that Almighty God will say very severe things ; a meditation is not an examination of conscience, but yet there will be occasions when it will become surprisingly deep in its home-thrusts ; and we may no more run away from Him then than at other times we may put ourselves forward. It is the sight of Him which will most make us afraid and ashamed ; He will shew to us not merely our sins, but how sinful we are. " Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." It is very good in a meditation to be quite still at times, and just to let ourselves lie in the sight of the great Judge. " I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye hath seen Thee. Wherefore I abhor myself in dust and ashes."

At other times God will show to His servant something very difficult to do ; he shrinks, but the divine Voice says, " My grace is sufficient for thee." At first the servant expostulates, he would beg off ; but at the last he replies, " Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe." It may be the abandonment of a cherished possession which is called for, or the undertaking of what is arduous, or at least against the inclination, and a battle has to be fought on the knees. In eagerness the disciple has asked for the right or the left hand seat in the kingdom, and he has been shewn the cup and the baptism.

But there must be no straining ; if God does not force such experiences, who are we to force Him ? Right intention, a readiness for all that He may say ; then if He have such a message He will not deny us it. Day after day, however, the disciples walked with Jesus Christ in the fields, along the city streets, by the sea-shore, without any crisis. Such came soon enough, all too soon. Only be ready, learning the simpler ways of meditation and contemplation, giving Him the heart loyally ; then when He speaks, answer. " To-day, if ye shall hear His voice, harden not your hearts."

## Chapter VI.

## ON THE CONCLUSION

AT some time you will have sat down beside a good pianist and have watched him play some smooth, intricate and rapid passage with entire ease. His eyes have not moved from the music score ; his hands obey him and move in opposite directions with apparent naturalness. It is perhaps all the more wonderful to you, because you can just finger out a hymn tune slowly with one hand, and have tried to put in a left hand and have found how provokingly difficult it is to get the two hands to play different notes.

What you have been watching, while the pianist played, is the facility and ease which come from long practice. At first he began with scales, then every new movement of the hands was learned by exercises, how the hands should move in opposite directions, how the time might vary in the two hands. What you now see as apparently the easiest thing in the world is the result of years of steady application, and each secret has been learned separately, until now all unite in one result.

That is one side of the matter, the technique of meditation ; when we acquire facility we shall move freely through the different exercises without constraint, while without diligence we shall not attain much success ; and even pianists, it is said, soon lose ground if they cease to practise scales and exercises.

But if further, you were to ask a music master what he has to say of his pupils such answers as these might be expected ; one is too careless, another wishes to get on too fast, this one is not sufficiently painstaking, a fourth is too soon discouraged, another might do very well but he only thinks of enjoying himself, and as soon as he can play an easy thing well enough to please himself he is satisfied.

There is another side to the music lesson. Technique is not all ; music is not shorthand, there is a soul in it. Execution may be almost faultless, and yet the playing may be perfectly wooden. At school concerts such a performance may be heard in which all that the master has been able to teach is admirably reproduced by an obedient pupil, who has skilful fingers and a quick eye, and not a note of music in his composition. But now let someone play to whom music is his voice ; he will sing to you, mourn to you, he will

stir up your heart to think great things, or with a curious and undefined longing he will fill you.

The parable has been sufficiently expanded ; it would not be amiss perhaps to make a meditation upon it. These few readings have been the instructions ; practice alone will give freedom, skill, the power to interweave one part with another, such ease of movement that one is not conscious of following the laws of a meditation. But the spirit which fills all comes from elsewhere, lies behind the particular meditation, in the secrets of the heart where God rules, subdues, attracts, disciplines. At first one may not be able to fix the mind upon Him for more than a few minutes ; the effort of meditation may be so great that the attempt seems a pretence ; one may be conscious that one is only thinking *about* God, and indeed only trying to do that. Nevertheless the will rules over all.

Suggestions on meditation often speak of the final exercise as that of the will, by which is meant the resolution to be carried away and put into practice. It has been the idea running through these chapters that the will controls the whole exercise, that behind the meditation lies the will given to God, however short may come the daily life of the due intention of its surrender ; that the will rules the whole of the active energy of the meditation, that one wills to approach God, wills to keep the mind fixed upon Him for the few minutes, wills to train and curb the imagination, wills to think, wills to direct the affections aright, raise the aspiration, feel as one should feel, soberly, strongly, healthily, wills also to persevere.

At first fifteen minutes may seem a long time, and one may be grateful for the encouragement that five minutes spent on the introductory exercises and three on the closing ones, are really an integral portion of the meditation, and if carefully used are by no means lost time, although perchance the intervening seven minutes have been spent for the most part, and day after day, on a laborious task, and apparently without progress, in which one has failed to make a picture or lift up the voice to God, in which the very effort to do the one and the other has seemed to stifle the soul. Then, when a little progress has been made, the difficulty of moving from one exercise to another will seem very great ; to work up the picture will take time, and when the next stage is reached there will very probably be a serious break in the meditation and the picture will be laid aside. Then, at first, converse with God will be stiff ; the will does

not move easily, and the colloquies, if indeed progress be made beyond simple ejaculations, are awkwardly appended to the meditation as an after exercise.

When further progress has been made it may well be that fifteen minutes are not sufficient time, and half an hour will be required. But a complete simple meditation can be made in a quarter of an hour,* and so long as the time hangs heavily it is better not to attempt more than this minimum time, for which one thought is sufficient. After the opening prayers the picture is drawn out so as to lead up to this one consideration ; in simple ways it is pursued, the heart is lifted up to God, the thought is turned into a prayer, it is looked at afresh and expressed as an aspiration ; there is a glance back at the picture perhaps, and a new aspect of the thought is drawn out, and the heart is lifted up again to God, and now something is to be gathered up and carried away.

The resolution is a gathering up of the fragments that nothing be lost ; a meditant does not wish to come out of the presence of his Lord as from a visit which is past and done with ; he desires that something of the atmosphere of this quiet, something of the sense of the Divine Presence in which he lives, should remain with him throughout the day. For this purpose he chooses a resolution from his meditation ; and there are at the least two ways in which he may do this.

It may be that something in the course of his reflections has seemed to be appropriate to his circumstances ; an occasion to be avoided, a profitable exercise, an effort to be made ; or it may be an act of self-denial, mortification, resistance of temptation, or perhaps of charity or unselfishness, of diligence or good temper ; or perchance it is a devotion which has impressed itself upon him, an act of intercession to be made at mid-day, a prayer for the conversion of sinners, for the suffering, for those at home, for missionaries, for drunkards, for school-boys, for those in temptation ; or perhaps it is a resolution to read the Bible more slowly, or to make the evening examination better ; or the thoughts to-day have been penitential, and he resolves to say the 130th Psalm once, or the 139th ; or some line of a familiar hymn has threaded itself into the thoughts, and he says that he will find the hymn and say it on his knees to-day ; or he has

*It is not intended to imply that the most perfect meditations cannot be made in even five minutes ; but the treatment of the subject in these papers has always assumed leisure for devotion.

been thinking of the Blessed Sacrament and determining to begin to-night to make a more careful preparation for his next communion.

But it will happen that the thoughts do not suggest a resolution; this is the occasion for a different treatment. Instead of straining after a resolution, resolve either to recall the subject of the meditation once or perhaps twice during the day, or to review rapidly in the afternoon the outline of the thoughts which have come out of it, or to repeat at two different times one of the ejaculations used in this meditation, or to make an act of the presence of God twice during the day such as has been used on entering into the meditation. Great benefit may be found from the habit of recalling one's meditation in the afternoon, which has been called the least supernatural part of the day; the mind and body are less fresh than in the morning, and the labours of the day have been pressing upon the life for several hours; it is the time of spiritual sloth, when the powers of will and emotion are least reliable.

Certain conditions seem to attach to a good resolution of the former type, which may be noticed. It will often be one which is to be carried out the same day, and in such a case it should be easy, for one cannot do heroics every day, and it should be one which admits of a clear answer as to whether it has been observed or neglected, and the evening examination should include a question upon this duty. But it is not possible, nor desirable, that the resolution should always be referable to the one day only; there will be occasions when a new consideration, duty, or devotion has entered the mind, which it is desirable to absorb into the life; or a weak spot has been brought to one's notice, with regard to which a general resolution is advisable.

The following resolutions selected almost at random from a little book of outlines* contain several which answer to this description: "As to silence upon things of my inner life, and the faults of others"; "To listen to no suggestion from within or without to infringement of rule"; "To act up to the Virgin rule—Whatsoever He saith unto me, do it"; "As a communicant to prove love by offering what costs. What can I give up for Jesus?"; "If granted faith in communion, not to subsequently analyse feelings"; "Cultivate silence; ward off conversation from self to-day"; "To overcome gloom on any imagined grievance"; "Ask and ye shall

**Short Points for Daily Meditation*, published by W. Knott, London.

receive 'joy'"; "Thankful for the rest of to-night, but beware of self-indulgence"; "To have fixed times for secular as well as for devotional exercises"; "To be more patient when called off from prayer or meditation. Offer the interruption"; "As to avoiding conversation that I know may lead me into sin"; "As to not being disheartened by apparent loneliness in prayer"; "As to the employment of every hour of the day, and against sins of omission"; "As to confidence in God's mercy when praying for the souls of the faithful departed. Ejaculation to-day—May my last end be like theirs"; "No longer to allow the deadly sin of pride to call itself 'self-respect'"; "As to calming, not increasing or sharing, personal dislike."

On rare occasions the resolution will be epoch-making, and it may require, probably will in such cases, great preparation for its determined undertaking, much struggle, prayer, expostulation, and finally a taking up with one to the Holy Sacrifice to be received from the hand of the Master Himself in sacramental communion. Such resolutions correspond to the deeper mysteries of the Divine demands to which a very brief reference has been made.

The preference which has been somewhat implied for the simple practical resolution to be carried out the same day, whenever the meditant seems free to choose his resolution, and finds such an one arising out of his thoughts, is based upon the consideration that many devout people have a temptation to find scruples in resolutions, and that if they allow themselves to form many general resolutions they will become rather a snare than a help to them; whereas a simple and practical obligation is an aid to the checking of scruples, and its short duration prevents the mischief which with such dispositions will probably follow from permanent resolutions. The practical resolution of something to be done to-day is of value also to an emotional and sentimental disposition, which requires the discipline involved in its execution and the examination upon it.

There is more than one purpose in the resolution, and the practice of it ought not to be neglected. It is only needful here to mark that it is a good application of the truth that a meditation is not an end, but a means to an end; meditation is to affect life. When we feel very dissatisfied with our meditations, it is something to know that at least they give us a daily resolution which is to be kept; when we are growing dangerously pleased with ourselves about them, it is a

reminder to us of the practical character of the devotion, and a warning not to rely upon our pleasurable experiences.

The exercise of the memory is generally referred to the keeping in mind the subject of one's meditation from the time of its choice until the hour of meditation ; the resolution is, however, also an exercise of the memory, and that not only through the will, in the determination to keep the resolution, but further because it lets something of the atmosphere of the meditation hang about the day. We have been into the Presence of God in the morning, not because we shall be so busy during the day as to have no time to think of Him, but that the day may be consecrated to Him, so that He may be with us through it like a breath of fresh air where the sunlight plays.

The meditation was approached by the avenue of prayer : it is to be left by the same way. As then it was urged that the preliminary exercises should not be hurried, because they are part of the meditation, and dispose the mind rightly, so neither ought the meditation to be left hurriedly. Many an otherwise good meditation has suffered from this defect ; a bell goes, or the appointed time is up, and the meditation is left. But if the opening exercises have been carefully made, and the mind is rightly attuned to God, even though all the centre has been taken up in an attempt to recall the subject, or make a picture, or fix wandering thoughts, if only the closing exercises be now steadily and quietly used, the time spent in meditation will have been very profitable.

These final exercises will take the form of thanksgiving and confession. God is to be thanked for the meditation, however poor it has seemed to be ; His aid was sought at the beginning, and it is not a fault on His part if He has not granted what we consider a success. Perhaps He has willed failure ; perhaps He was ready to help us to make a good meditation, but we were wandering in thought, preoccupied or distracted, and should have checked ourselves and repeated the introductory acts ; or perhaps we allowed ourselves to be carried off into day-dreams, or to fall asleep. And why should we act now as though Almighty God was responsible for these and such-like defects ?

As with the opening prayers so with these closing ones, it will be found that in a short time they have acquired a fixed form, which must be followed slowly and with attention, and need only to be departed from when it is realised that they are being repeated mechanically. It is not good, otherwise, to be troubling oneself to compose a fresh form of words

daily; repetitions need not be vain, and it is our duty to see that they are not so.

After the act of thanksgiving, or before it, will be an act of confession, a humble acknowledgement that the meditation has not been what it might have been, because we are not what we might have been, because too we have not made the effort which we might have made towards a more spiritual meditation, and perhaps because we did not prepare for it carefully. Into this act of confession will be inserted any detail which has manifestly damaged to-day's meditation.

"Pardon, O Lord, I beseech Thee, the imperfections of this meditation; forgive my wandering thoughts, my coldness of heart, my lack of effort, and especially . . . . ; grant to me perseverance, and the will to serve Thee now and at all times. Give me the blessing of Thy presence to-day, and Thy grace to perform my resolution."

Then close. Some use the Lord's Prayer, others say the *Anima Christi*, some say both. Then say, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ," etc., and, after a slight pause, rise slowly and go away, repeating the resolution.

Ad gloriam Dei in eius voluntate.

## APPENDIX

1. What strikes me most in reading these chapters after some years is that they dwell too much on the intellectual side of meditation. That was perhaps excusable in the first instance. I was thinking of young students, and was trying to guard them from emotionalism, because it was probable that this which was suppressed in their intellectual life might be given excessive play in their meditations ; and I wanted to suggest to them a certain spiritualising of their critical faculties.

But others are differently situated ; and I doubt whether for them this frame work is the right way in which to begin. It may easily lead to a formal exercise which ultimately cramps the spirit. Some are afraid to become free, lest they should not make a " good " meditation. Fr. Benson used to say, " if any one told you what to do when you walked, you would be afraid to move for fear of breaking something ; but you just walk. So in meditation."

A meditation has for its aim the realisation of God Himself. Methods of meditation are only a means to this end, and the means may easily become too engrossing. What is most to be sought is stillness, a silence that goes deeper than from external noise. There is a stilling of the heart, encouraged —after some experience—to become a stilling of all mental activity. Therein it proceeds further than active prayer. We are tempted to talk too much to God, and because of this prayer may become restless and unsatisfying. We do not wait upon Him, with the mind braced like Samuel's ; " Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth."

In meditation it is human personality that seeks to put itself into fellowship with divine Personality. The human personality has a history, an experience, and is in a certain spiritual condition, which God knows. What a person needs for meditation is the right attitude to God, confidence in His Fatherly care, and desire that His will be done in him. If these be there, he can but place himself in God's presence and wait on Him. If anything that he has learnt in the past about how to make a meditation helps him to do this, let him make use of it, so long as he is not the slave of his acquired habits. But increasingly let him encourage stillness of heart, and restrain mental activity, lest he do not give opportunity to God. There should be a readiness of spirit to let oneself

be led. Many continue in the practice of active meditation when God is wanting to lead them on. They restrain themselves from progress, sometimes because they are afraid of day-dreams, sometimes from not realising what God is ready to do, sometimes because they shrink from being led further than they wish to go. But if meditation is to pass on to contemplation, one must not have spiritual reservations, but must be ready to launch out into the deep for the spiritual exploration of God's love in holiness.

Deep within us lies a capacity for the realisation of God. It lies beneath all the active faculties. It is very possible not to reach to this in the normal activity of prayer, but to be knowing God only through the faculties that are on the surface. Some prayer does reach to it, especially that which is not inaptly called "being in an agony." And if this has been reached, either in this way or through the silence of meditation, then normal prayer can enter into new relationship and become converse with God and not merely confession and petition and acts of devotion.

2. Distraction is so universal a difficulty, that one may be forgiven if one attempt to make a suggestion. It is a mistake to try to empty the mind of disturbing thoughts ; they will only crowd in the more. When one wants to concentrate upon a book one does not try to put other thoughts aside ; one thinks of the subject about which one is reading. In meditation God is one's subject, and it is on Him that the mind must be directed, not on the topic chose as a means of meditation. The advice must be, therefore, not to put distracting thoughts out of your mind, but to put thoughts of God into it. And this suggestion leads to another. It makes one remember that we cannot put God into our minds, so as to concentrate upon Him as one concentrates upon a book in which one is very interested,—and concentration is largely a matter of interest—unless one is wholly interested in God. And that is only to say that meditation is not an exercise for the careless ; vital prayer must lie behind it, and a spiritual experience.

There is another word to be said about distraction. A requirement for meditation is certainly humility. We must not expect great things. We shall not be wrapped in mystery, caught up, taken out of the body. We are following in the footsteps of the Saints, but at a great distance. To meditate well, one must love God intensely, not in imagination only but in service and self-sacrifice. Yet it is possible to mistake

wonderful thoughts and fancies for the sight of God Himself, and to be elated. Far better is it that we should think that our meditations are very poor, and be content to know that we have no claim to expect otherwise. Only God knows our meditation, and He already knew our spiritual condition. We must not be cast down by the quite ridiculous way in which outside thoughts intrude. It is only pride that is hurt if we let ourselves be discouraged. All that we need to do is to direct our hearts again to God without any impatience or vexation. It does not matter if the chain of thought is altogether broken.

Not to be identified with distraction is the common experience, spoken of as being "stuck." Humility must again come to help one through. It is so easy to give up one's meditation, and to say, "I could not make a meditation to-day." It is the time at which to do nothing but to put oneself in silence before God, for Him to see one. Sit or kneel in His presence; empty and speechless. That may be just what He desires of His servant, to be lying, as it were, outside the Master's door. Do not give up in disappointment, even though the time of waiting seems to leave Him asleep in His chamber. But when your time of waiting is ended, thank Him that He has seen you, and let your closing exercises be as careful as were those with which you began the meditation. And let there be no thought that the time has been wasted.

The end of meditation is to see God face to face and to serve Him, beholding the glory of the Lord with open face as we are changed into the same image from glory to glory. That is our encouragement, and our aspiration, as Jesus Christ is forming Himself in us (II. Cor. iv. 6). But the end is not yet. It is nevertheless the aim of our whole life, and it rules our meditations as a means of catching glimpses of that glory. Let us keep that end in view in the exercise of meditation, and pay less heed to the skeleton form, to the various parts, and to the tidy shape of the meditation. Spiritual desires are the best things to bring to one's meditation, strengthened by their daily exercise in life. And in the meditation they will become fixed, take root and grow, as life and meditation, struggle and aspiration, go hand in hand. "Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel, and after that receive me with glory."

3. I venture to reprint a few simple words on a possible way in which busy people may make good, informal meditation, and in which they often do so while not thinking that they are doing so.

For men and women, who are really very busy all day, the spare time, all too short, in the morning and evening is taken up with prayers and Bible reading. If they are to make opportunity for the disciplined contemplation of God, they must learn to appreciate the value of a few minutes of retirement within themselves, where the presence of God is to be found. They cannot expect to enjoy the quiet of the oratory and the undisturbed half-hour.

It will require determination to find any time possible ; it will require the same to make good use of the time, not giving way to distraction, nor to disappointment. But the bending of the will to this is a sacrifice to God, which is the sweet odour of devotion ; and, if the will be given to Him, a man is accepted according to what he hath and not according to what he hath not. And this principle applies to time and capacity as well as to other possessions.

Recognise therefore how greatly you need, as a very busy person, and much in the world, to practise the presence of God, and be assured that if you have the will God will provide the way. The great snare will be to think that this is not a proper meditation. But, in truth, any one meditates quite properly enough for Almighty God, who will give Him the few minutes which can be snatched from a busy day, even if it be while darning the stockings, if only the thoughts are given to Him because He is the first desire of one's life, and because one cannot live through the day without lifting up the heart to Him, lest one become entangled in the multitude of temporal cares.

Such an one will not make any use of meditation outlines ; there is no time to prepare for the meditation formally. It is the heart that must be prepared. The good God always orders our life for us in such way as we may make most advance according to His Will, one in this way, one in that. He is leading a devout life in its highest form, who always lives with God, and whose prayer is :

> I ask Thee for a present mind,
> Intent on pleasing Thee.

Choose therefore some point for meditation which is already in the heart ; a verse of the Psalms which has been helping you since Sunday ; a thought from the sermon ; a line of a favourite hymn. Or think about the love of God, or about Jesus Christ, or of the forgiveness of sins, or of leaving the children in the care of God. Then consider that the work which you are doing is not a distraction from His service,

but is His service. Put yourself in that way into His presence. If you are alone you can kneel down for a momentary act of worship; but very probably you cannot do this. Now lift up the heart to Him, and just think of Him; say to Him whatever is in your heart, a little prayer for grace, an ejaculation. All that you need is to recall His presence as your Saviour, Guardian and Friend. You have meditated, if you have realised this. Then thank Him. In this way you have made a meditation in five minutes.

Gradually you may be led on to something further; your own spiritual experiences are giving you many things to think about, and your Bible reading has stored your mind with divine utterances. You want to think; you have an illustration to be drawn out. You must learn now to carry on a progressive meditation from day to day, picking up a crumb each day, and going back to what you were last thinking of and carrying it on a stage further.

I will suppose that it is Eastertide, and that the sermon last Sunday was upon the words, "Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre? . . . The stone was rolled away" (St. Mark xvi. 3, 4). It is easy to think of these women sadly waiting all the Saturday with their spices ready, then getting up very early on the Sunday morning, and starting almost before dawn on their mournful visit, walking silently with broken hearts. What were they thinking of? Picture to yourself their past glorious memories, and how through them all ran the terrible fact of Good Friday, and the hopeless depression of a Christ Who only *was*. Here you lift up the heart to Him in praise, knowing Him to be a Christ Who is ever present with you. You thank God for His gift of a living, loving Saviour. And now something calls you off; but you have the fruits within you of a good meditation.

To-morrow you find a few minutes; you begin as you began yesterday, and you come to the new difficulty—that stone in the way. Yet the women go on, cannot keep away indeed from the tomb which holds the love that had been. Dear Lord, give me such perseverance! And that stone: have I never felt something like that between myself and Christ?

It is perhaps the third day before you reach the words, "The stone was rolled away." You recall past difficulties in your life which somehow have disappeared: you think of Him Who removed them; you praise Him. You pray for a faith which will remove mountains. You take courage.

And each day you carry with you Christ in your heart and in your daily life. You have brought Him into the troubles and distractions of business and home, and life is illuminated. Can you not meditate? Well! never mind whether you can or not; but as you love the dear Lord and to think of Him, let your mind play with these holy scenes, or with any everyday illustration which you can work up with a little prayer and a little of your own spiritual experience; and even if to day you scarcely get into your subject, you will have spent a few profitable moments, brightening your heart by His presence, providing something to think of at another time, and training your imagination to do something better than dwell on grievances and trials and sadness and difficulties and depressions. And by degrees you will acquire greater facility, and it will grow to be a great source of help to you, just like saying over to yourself snatches of hymns, which attract you and help you to realise the unseen beauties of God.

When shall these eyes Thy heaven-built walls
And pearly gates behold?

. . . . . .

Oh, Christ! do Thou my soul prepare
For that bright home of love.

THE END

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